



FOR THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF RIVERS ALLIANCE OF CONNECTICUT  
March 18, 2019

Raised House Bill 5312  
AAC VEGETATION MANAGEMENT WITHIN UTILITY PROTECTION ZONES  
**Support**

To: Chairmen Sen. Christine Cohen and Rep. Mike Demicco,  
And Honorable Members of the Committee:

*Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and providing education on water stewardship.*

This bill (RB 5312) provides much needed reform of the manner in which utilities clear vegetation within protection zones and rights of way. We and, I am sure, members of this Committee, have received numerous complaints about excessive cutting and clearing, especially in recent years.

With respect to tree trimming or removal around roadside lines, Rivers Alliance is concerned mainly the practice of spreading pesticides on stumps or other places where regrowth is not wanted. Pesticides are present in all US streams according to the US Geological Survey. **We recommend that this bill require a utility give notice to the municipality and adjacent homeowners when and where pesticides are to be applied, as well as what products and quantities will be used, especially when high-quality waters are nearby.** Freshwater species are in decline for several reasons, with pesticide use high among them.

One of the major barriers to managing pesticide use is that no one has good records of the cumulative quantities of pesticides applied in towns and watersheds. When pesticides turn up in drinking water or high-quality streams, we need that data to respond efficiently.

A more obvious problem has been the dramatic increase in extensive cutting along accessways for transmission and distribution lines. Back when Eversource was Northeast Utilities, it would consult with Audubon and other environmental groups, including Rivers Alliance, on management practices that would maximize habitat value for plants and animals while meeting

the utility's needs for access. In the past half dozen years, Eversource appears to have abandoned interest in preserving environmental benefits in its manner of managing its rights of way. It is easy to see the enlarged and reconstructed access roads, and the wide swaths of cut vegetation stretching over hill and dale. Eversource notes that that the federal government has required this work improve emergency response time. We all want rapid emergency responses. But these overland routes could easily accommodate a tank brigade.

What's harder to see from the road are what appear to be 30-foot square gravel pads at the base of each pole. Cumulatively this design removes a great deal of vegetation and natural soil cover along miles of open space.

We have not normally weighed in on these matters because we do not usually have information on the direct effect (if any) on water. But we did have a chance to comment late last year on an Eversource clearing project on land owned by the Steep Rock Land Trust in Washington CT; the project did involve a stream crossing. We recommended that the utility meet with town officials and the land trust to explain the project. We would ask for an inventory of the plants or other natural features to be destroyed. Proposed pesticide use is vital information. The utility should also consider ways to downsize and mitigate the work. The utility did meet with stakeholders, and it is our understanding that, in this case and several others, it is being more responsive to environmental concerns. But there is a long way to go.

Northeast Utility formerly did offer informational meetings on proposed projects. I covered well-attended meetings in the same town of Washington over a new substation. **We ask that this bill revive the practice of such informational meetings.** In anticipation of a utility complaint that today this would be too expensive and would cause rates to rise, we've seen that Eversource, at least, has extra funds in the billion-dollar range to buy and bid on Connecticut water companies. Surely it can afford more interaction with its customers and stakeholders.

Thank you for raising this bill.

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